

Kavanaugh's stand-and-fight strategy was nearly stopped before it could start. On Monday morning, September 17, Kellyanne Conway, the counselor to the president, told Fox News that Ford "should not be insulted, she should not be ignored. She should testify under oath and she should do it on Capitol Hill."¹¹ That's exactly what Kavanaugh and his advisors had decided to ask for, but they were frustrated when Conway got ahead of them, fearing that their statement now would look less like a display of confidence than a concession to a skeptical White House. Still, everyone had to adapt. Even President Trump's comments for most of the week were restrained, essentially echoing what Conway said.

Also on Monday morning, Debra Katz gave interviews to a number of television networks. She told NBC that Ford was willing to testify.¹² On CNN, she revealed that Ford had spoken with Senator Feinstein soon after July 30 and retained counsel. "We were in touch" with Feinstein's office throughout the following weeks, Katz said.¹³ On CBS she added that Ford was "willing to do whatever is necessary" to make sure the committee had the "full story" and, ominously, the "full set of allegations."¹⁴

Prior to the allegations, the judicial nomination process had been handled through the White House counsel's office, with additional help detailed from other offices in the White House and Department of Justice. When the Ford news broke, other parties in the White House tried to intervene, and squabbles were soon breaking out. Some White House surrogates were telling the media that McGahn and his team were botching the response and that President Trump was losing confidence. That wasn't true, but there was intense pressure to allow others to help. Shah and Kerri Kupec had handled communications prior to the allegations, but the broader White House communications team now began to be more involved.

Only one large official moot was held after the Ford allegations broke, even before a hearing was officially scheduled. The White House director of communications, Bill Shine, and the press secretary, Sarah Sanders, along with a number of others, played the parts of various senators. It was important for those supporting Kavanaugh in the media to

be convinced of his credibility if they were to do their jobs well. But the involvement of more persons made leaks more likely. The Kavanaugh team had been tight-lipped, priding itself on its discretion in a notoriously leaky administration. But those leading the confirmation effort thought that the advantages of broadening the team were worth the risk. To be safe, they warned Kavanaugh that he shouldn't say anything that he didn't want to be made public. He kept quiet about the existence of his calendars, therefore, so he could reveal them on his own timing. Shah had drafted intrusive questions for Sanders to ask, but she was too uncomfortable to do so. Another participant asked them instead.

At the end of a moot, Kavanaugh ordinarily left so the participants could discuss his performance and decide on a single strategy. After he left the room, someone interrupted the discussion to announce that the media were already reporting that Kavanaugh was mooting with the press team. Later the *Washington Post* cited three sources who reported that "Kavanaugh grew frustrated when it came to questions that dug into his private life, particularly his drinking habits and his sexual proclivities."¹⁵ They added that he declined to answer some questions altogether, which made it sound like he had something to hide. In fact, one of the goals of the moot had been to determine the right place to draw a line on invasive questions, and the only question he had ultimately declined to answer was when he had first slept with his wife.

Their suspicions about the discretion of the broader group confirmed, the core Kavanaugh team resolved to get rid of any nonessential aides. Contrary to the press reports, they felt he had handled the moot so well that another moot could be counterproductive. They didn't want him to go into the hearing sounding scripted.

Kavanaugh also spoke by telephone to the Judiciary Committee staff under penalty of felony on Monday. He "unequivocally denied" the allegations. Democratic staff members could have asked any question they wanted, but they declined to participate in the interview. Kavanaugh requested a hearing right away, the next day if possible. He knew that with each passing day the media would elaborate on their portrait of a sexual predator and activists would redouble their search for dirt.